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ABSTRACT

This document explores the relationship between ambiguity and the ambiguous concept of culture which is of fundamental interest to organizational culture researchers. After an overview of the topic, a matrix framework for understanding different approaches to studying cultures is presented. The matrix framework is used to contrast two paradigms that have dominated organizational culture research to date. In the second half of the document, the concepts of cultural harmony and conflict are introduced and contrasted to ambiguity. The treatment of ambiguity is shown to be a key to understanding the differences between these first two paradigms. It is noted that ambiguity also points to a blindspot, an essential third paradigm as yet unexplored by organizational cultural researchers. A way out of the dilemma caused by the existence of these competing paradigms is offered. The resulting consolidation presented bridges an apparent lack of paradigmatic measurability and offers insights unavailable to any paradigm by itself. Five pages of references are included. (ABL)

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Organizational Cultures and the Denial, Channeling, and Acceptance of Ambiguity

Joanne Martin and Debra Meyerson

July 1986

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Graduate School of Business — Stanford University

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Organizational Cultures

and the Denial, Channeling, and Acceptance of Ambiguity

Organizational culture researchers have done no better than their anthropological colleagues in developing a universally acceptable approach to the study of culture. They disagree vehemently about such fundamental issues as: What is organizational culture? How should it be studied? Should we focus only on that which is apparently shared by all (or most) cultural members? What about cultural contradictions and conflicts of interest?

The relationship between culture and ambiguity is also unclear. Does culture exist only where ambiguity is absent, so that culture becomes that which is clear in a world otherwise full of confusion and meaninglessness? Or, is ambiguity unavoidable, to be reluctantly tolerated as an unpleasant fact of cultural life? Or, should ambiguity be fully embraced, perhaps as a key to innovation or adaptive change?

Two sets of views on these issues have dominated organizational culture research to date. These views are so radically different that we refer to them as paradigms. As we use this term, a "paradigm" is a subjective point of view that cultural members and observers, such as researchers, bring to the experience of a culture. Paradigms serve as theoretical lenses for researchers and as cognitive maps for members, determining what a person perceives, conceives, and enacts as culture. This does not imply that researchers and cultural members share the same or similar paradigmatic points of view. Indeed, researchers and members are quite likely to see the same culture differently, particularly if the researcher maintains an outsider (etic) point of view.

Because of paradigmatic differences, it is difficult for organizational culture researchers to build on each other's findings. One researcher's assumptions are, to another researcher, evidence of epistemological naivete, methodological sloppiness, or inexcusable political bias. For these reasons, organizational culture researchers are currently unable to consolidate what has been learned from the recent proliferation of interest in cultural phenomena.

Without some resolution of paradigmatic differences, organizational culture research will remain isolated from mainstream theoretical and empirical debates, liable for dismissal as "old wine in new skins," "another disappointing theoretical deadend," or "last year's easy answer." This would be unfortunate, because this area of inquiry, first opened decades ago by Selznick and Barnard, has produced a wealth of

insights that can be meaningfully contrasted and consolidated.

However, resolving paradigmatic differences is obviously easier said than done. Any valid resolution must retain a sensitivity to the internal integrity and complexity of each paradigmatic viewpoint, eschewing abstractions that reduce interesting differences to the lowest common denominator. At the same time, a useful resolution must offer some kind of a meta-level framework that permits insightful understandings about fundamental differences. The trick, of course, is to do this without mixing or trading "off incommensurables lightly or with verbal pyrotechics" (Roethlisberger, 1977:472). This we will try to do in the pages that follow. First, however, a brief overview may be helpful.

This chapter explores the relationship between ambiguity and the ambiguous concept of culture. We begin by presenting a matrix framework for understanding different approaches to studying cultures. The matrix framework is used to contrast two paradigms that have dominated organizational culture research to date. In the second half of the chapter, the concepts of cultural harmony and conflict are introduced and contrasted to ambiguity. The treatment of ambiguity is shown to be a key to understanding the differences between these first two paradigms. Ambiguity also points to a blindspot, an essential third paradigm as yet unexplored by organizational culture researchers. A way out of the dilemma caused by the existence of these competing paradigms is offered. The resulting consolidation bridges apparent paradigmatic incommensurabilities and offers insights unavailable to any paradigm by itself.

This odyssey into ambiguity is impossible without some disambiguating definitions. Thus, at the risk of some initial tedium, we need a conceptual framework for talking about culture. The matrix framework described below is broad enough to encompass the widely divergent ways organizational culture has been defined. At the same time, the framework is specific enough to clarify the differences, as well as the similarities, among these definitions.

A Matrix Framework for the Study of Culture

Rather than offering yet another abstract definition of culture, the matrix framework focuses on what organizational culture researchers actually study. Three types of cultural manifestations are most frequently studied: practices, artifacts, and content themes.

Practices can be either formal or informal. Formal practices are explicitly dictated by an organization's rules, procedures, and structures. Formal practices include, for example, an institution's organizational chart, reporting relationships, job descriptions, rules for performance appraisal, explicit criteria for hiring and promotion, and pay distribution

policies.

Informal practices are behavioral norms that may or may not be consistent with formal rules and procedures. Informal practices include communication norms, for example, about whether conflict should be confronted or smoothed over. Other informal practices include habits of interaction, such as "binging" overzealous workers on an assembly line or the ways personal relationships circumvent official hierarchical channels. Most mainstream organizational research has focused on formal and/or informal practices. If organizational culture researchers studied only practices, they would indeed be guilty of selling "old wine in new skins."(1)

Artifacts(2) are a type of cultural manifestation that offer a newer focus for research. Artifacts include rituals and ceremonies (e.g., Trice and Beyer, 1984), organizational stories (e.g., Martin, 1982; Wilkins, 1978), jargon and special language (e.g., Evered, 1983; Hirsch and Andrews, 1983), humor (e.g., Boland and Hoffman, 1983), and physical arrangements, such as office space or dress codes (e.g., Pfeffer, 1981). Artifacts are the cultural manifestations that lend themselves most easily to symbolic interpretation.

Content themes are abstractions used by researchers, and sometimes organizational members, to organize the interpretation of practices and artifacts. Such content themes can be either ideational (cognitive) or ideological (attitudinal). Ideological content themes focus on values, or more specifically, beliefs (e.g., Martin and Siehl, 1983; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Pettigrew, 1979; Smith and Simmons, 1983; Wilkins, 1983). Ideational content themes are usually inferred from interpretations, for example, about the meaning of events or the allocation of material goods (e.g., Barley, 1983; Hatch, 1985). Schein (1981) argues that culture researchers should focus on a particular type of ideational or ideological content theme: deep, often preconscious assumptions, such as whether a short or long-term perspective on time is appropriate to a given organizational context.

Of course, content themes may not always be consistent with artifacts and practices. One reason for this is that organizational members may change what they espouse, depending on their audience. It is essential, for example, to distinguish the content themes that organizational members espouse internally, to other organizational members, and the content themes they espouse to external audiences, such the general public, through such media as annual reports (Martin, Anterasian, and Siehl, 1983). Such externally espoused content themes often represent an attempt to influence what has been called an organization's "aura" (Christensen and Kreiner, 1984) or "reputation" (Kreps, 1984); they may bear little relationship to what is espoused or enacted within an organization.

Figure 1 uses the matrix framework to present a partial

description of the culture at OZ company (referred to below as OZCO). For the moment, please consider the structure of the matrix rather than the content of cell entries that present specific manifestations of OZCO's culture. The three types of cultural manifestations -- content themes, practices, and artifacts -- are listed across the top of the matrix. The left-hand column of the matrix can consist of a list of content themes that are related to a subset of observed practices and/or artifacts. This particular matrix presents the practices and artifacts relevant to one content theme: egalitarianism. A more complete matrix for OZCO would include other themes, such as the importance of innovation and humanitarian values ("We are a family").

Insert Figure 1 about here.

There are several reasons why it is useful to place cultural manifestations within the matrix framework. The matrix can be used to compare the ways different researchers define culture. Without reference to abstract definitions of culture, study of the usage, and non-usage, of the columns of the matrix makes it easy to contrast which manifestations of culture researchers actually study when they claim to be studying culture. Thus, the matrix can be used to represent the work of researchers who focus on all of three kinds of cultural manifestations. It can also represent the cultural studies of "specialists," who choose to focus on one or a very few of these manifestations. (e.g., Schall's (1983) study of culture as informal communication norms).

The matrix format also draws attention to the presence or absence of consistency and consensus. Examination of the rows of the matrix reveals consistencies and inconsistencies across various types of cultural manifestations, for example between formal and informal practices. The matrix format can also encompass individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis, revealing consensus or lack of consensus. A different matrix can represent each different viewpoint. For example, the work of a researcher who claims to have found content themes, practices, and artifacts that are shared by all organizational members can be represented within a single matrix. Multiple matrices can represent the work of a researcher who focuses on sub-cultural or individual differences in perspective.(3)

Thus, the matrix framework can encompass, and be used to compare, highly divergent approaches to the study of culture. At this point, an extended analysis of a culture may be useful, in order to clarify distinctions among the various cultural manifestations, illustrate these claims for the versatility of the matrix, and introduce the paradigms. Below, the culture of the OZ company is described from the point of view of the first

of the three paradigms.

OZCO is a multi-national electronics firm. Headquartered in "Silicon Valley," in 1985 the company had over 80,000 employees worldwide. Net revenue exceeded $6,000 million. OZCO's culture was selected for analysis because this firm (and other firms with similar characteristics) have been studied by several organizational culture researchers, as well as by scholars interested in the management of innovation (e.g., Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Riggs, 1983; Wilkins, 1978). In addition to studying these texts and available archival documentation, we conducted in-depth open-ended interviews with a series of past and present employees. Names and non-essential details have been changed below, in order to protect the anonymity of these informants.

Egalitarianism at OZCO: A Paradigm 1 Analysis

One of the hallmark concerns of the top management of OZCO has been a desire to institutionalize a relatively egalitarian approach to employee relations. This egalitarian content theme has been espoused to both external and internal audiences. For example, the company's 1985 annual report to its shareholders states:

> Central to OZCO's corporate culture and personnel policies is the concept of sharing with its people -- sharing the responsibilities for defining and meeting goals, sharing in economic ups and downs, and sharing opportunities for personal and professional development.

This espoused value is reflected in some of OZCO's formal practices. For example, all employees are given an opportunity to be involved in the United Way charity, a stock plan, and a profit sharing program. Everyone is required to answer his or her own telephone, whenever possible. Some informal practices are also consistent with this egalitarian emphasis. For example, OZCO encourages "Management By Walking Around" (MBWA) in order to facilitate informal interchange, improve the accessibility of high ranking employees, and reverse the usual hierarchical priorities by having superiors come to their subordinates.

Artifacts, such as rituals, also reflect a concern with egalitarianism. At some point during the parties that conclude training programs and award ceremonies, the president of OZCO, Bill Hammond, usually shows up and personally greets participants in a manner that deliberately transcends differences in status. For example, at a "Senior Sales Seminar," top performing sales employees were socializing with corporate personnel:

> Bill Hammond walked in by himself. He just walked in and personally introduced himself: "Hi. I'm Bill Hammond." In no way did his actions communicate any aura of

superiority. He was just one of the many bodies in the room. He shook hands, talked to you, and he remembers you. In this, he shows a real appreciation. (Stuart, Vertical Marketing Engineer)

In most companies, corporate headquarters is a high status job assignment. Apparently not at OZCO, where company jargon refers to corporate space as "retirement village" because "time in corporate is like taking time off because you have no profit-loss responsibility" (Joni, Corporate Development).

Physical arrangements also confirm egalitarian values. Employees dress casually; even the president is seen frequently in shirt sleeves. Everyone eats in the same cafeteria. Perhaps most importantly, OZCO has open offices, with relatively low partitions dividing small cubicles. Only external "boundary spanners" have fancy offices. This space allocation policy is said to facilitate open, informal communication patterns that reduce status differentials. These physical arrangements make it essential that employees get along with each other:

> People get involved in each other's personal lives simply because they overhear each other on the phone. There is no privacy, so a "family" atmosphere is fostered. (Denise, Product Sales)

At OZCO "perks" are not supposed to be distributed according to status. Instead, need and one's functional responsibilities determine who gets which space, desks, or equipment:

> If you have a reason, you get something better. Design people get better terminals. Sales people have cars, but they need them. I have a schlocky desk, but that's OK. I can still do my work. (Stuart, Vertical Marketing Engineer)

> The way to get a good parking space around here is to be the first one at work in the morning. (Joseph, former Chairman of the Board)

OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism is reinforced by two formal practices that have beeen emphasized in organizational culture research on companies like OZCO: bottom-up consensual decision-making and lateral promotion ladders. At OZCO, consensual decision making procedures are designed to push decisions down to the lowest possible level of the hierarchy. For example, an idea for a new product or product enhancement can originate in any division or functional area. The relevant people from a variety of functional areas, all at the same level in the company hierarchy, meet to reach consensus about the idea's worth and relative importance. If the idea is deemed worthwhile, it becomes a "project" and the various pieces of the project are assigned to appropriate functional areas. In this way, ideas are generated and evaluated at relatively low levels of the corporate hierarchy. Issues can be escalated upwards, repeatedly if necessary, if bottlenecks or irreconcilable

differences occur.

New employees, unfamiliar with the OZCO way of filtering decisions up from lower levels of the divisions, are sometimes told the story of why an attempt to institute strategic planning at OZCO was a failure:

> Relatively recently, a "strategy retreat" was held for very senior personnel. This was the first time OZCO had considered instituting a formal, systematic strategic planning effort at the corporate level. No strategy was set during the retreat, but the process was discussed. People objected to a centralized strategy because "It was not the OZCO way." (Sally, Workforce Planning)

OZCO's lateral promotion policy provides an alternative to the usual, purely vertical promotion ladder. Top performers usually receive "promotions" that are horizontal (same level, different functional area) before they are moved up one level of the hierarchy. This policy is apparently not just empty rhetoric:

> Employees are encouraged to move horizontally around the organization. Lateral movements tend to homogenize divisions. Most of the VP's have worked in several divisions. The more divisions you work in, the more highly you are valued, even at the price of not developing expertise in a given area. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

> Nobody will think less of you, or think you are fickle if you interview around. One of the benefits of working at OZCO is the emphasis on personal development and the option of broadening yourself in different functional areas. There's not the pressure to specialize. Someone could move from marketing to finance because they want a change. This is accepted. It's not looked at as waffling or a lack of commitment. (Denise, Product Sales)

According to these employees, OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism is real; it surfaces in a wide variety of cultural manifestations, including externally espoused values, formal practices, informal practices, jargon, rituals, stories, and physical arrangements. This view of the OZCO culture is summarized, using the matrix format, in Figure 1.

Paradigm 1: Integration

This cultural portrait of OZCO is a Paradigm 1 view because it emphasizes consistency and consensus. Specifically, three types of consistency emerge: action, symbolic, and content.

Action consistency occurs when content themes are consistent with an organization's formal and informal practices. For example, in the Paradigm 1 description of OZCO's culture, the

espoused value of egalitarianism was reflected in formal and informal practices, such as participation in United Way, a stock plan, profit sharing, answering one's own telephone, "Management By Walking Around," need-based distribution of "perks," "bottom-up" consensual decision-making, and lateral promotions. Schein's (1983) research on organizational culture also generally stresses action consistency. For example, at one family-dominated company, the founder stressed the value of conflict. He believed firmly that the best decisions emerge from fierce arguments about alternatives. This value was consistently translated into action, for example in decision making meetings that became tumultuous shouting matches.

A second type of consistency is symbolic. It occurs when the symbolic meanings of artifacts, such as stories and jargon, are congruent with a firm's formal and informal practices. For example, in the Paradigm 1 portrait of OZCO's culture, egalitarian practices were reinforced by Bill Hammond's behavior at company rituals, "retirement village" jargon, and the story about the failure of corporate strategic planning. Physical arrangements, such as casual dress norms, a single cafeteria for all employees, open office spaces, and first-come, first-served allocation of parking spaces also reinforced these egalitarian practices.

Symbolic consistency is also evident in Pettigrew's (1979) portrayal of the activities of public school headmasters. Whenever these headmasters tried to change formal or informal practices in their schools, they reinforced the desired changes with symbolic artifacts. For example, they created rituals or told organizational stories that expressed appreciation for the types of behaviors they were seeking to encourage.

Content consistency occurs when content themes are consistent with each other. As only one content theme was described above in the OZCO analysis, consistency across themes cannot be examined. However, OZCO typifies the type of corporate culture which Ouchi (1981) has labeled Theory Z. These types of cultures exhibit three content themes that are mutually consistent: a holistic concern for the physical and psychological well-being of the employee and his or her family; a long, rather than short term perspective on decisions about products and people; and a desire for "shared values," rather than "red tape" as ways of controlling deviant behavior. Obviously, such broad-based, personal concern about employees would not be appropriate, and the development of "shared values" would not be possible, if only a short-term perspective were being taken. Thus, the central content themes of Theory Z cultures reinforce each other, creating an internally consistent ideology.

The remainder of Ouchi's Theory Z characteristics are practices that are consistent with these three content themes. When commitments have been made to long-term relationships, holistic concern for employee well-being, and developing shared

values, then it makes sense to advocate practices such as time-consuming consensual decision-making and the relatively slow vertical promotion rates characteristic of lateral career ladders. Thus, the content themes and practices of a Theory Z culture reinforce each other, creating action and content consistency. Similar patterns of consistency (including also symbolic consistency) can be seen in the Paradigm 1 cultural descriptions by Barley, (1983), Deal and Kennedy, (1982), Pascale and Athos, (1981), Peters and Waterman (1982), Pettigrew (1985), Schein (1985), and Siehl and Martin (forthcoming).

Consistency is the first essential characteristic of Paradigm 1 research. Consensus is the second. Paradigm 1 research usually defines culture as that which cultural members share -- the glue that holds an organization together. With some disregard for tautology, this definition is then used as a codebreaker; only that which is apparently shared is considered part of a culture. Thus, Paradigm 1 research describes content, practices, and artifacts that are supposedly perceived and interpreted in the same ways by all, or at least most, members of a culture.

Such claims of consensus are usually based on a combination of the resesearcher's insight and information from selected sources, usually a small number of relatively high ranking informants. Although the assumption of a shared perspective is conceptually central, Paradigm 1 research seldom makes a systematic attempt to determine exactly who shares what perspective.

One hundred percent agreement on any issue may, in fact, be a relatively rare phenomenon, particularly in organizational contexts where conflicts of interest are endemic. Paradigm 1 research would be enriched by the provision of detailed qualitative or quantitative data concerning the content and intensity of agreement and the parameters of deviance. A few studies are beginning to move in this direction (e.g., Friedman, 1983; Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm, 1985; Wilkins, 1978).

There is a final characteristic that is exhibited by most, but not all, Paradigm 1 portrayals of culture: past or present leaders of an organization are seen as the source of cultural manifestations. The leader, often a founder or current Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O), is given credit for creating the central content themes of the culture and initiating the formal and informal practices that implement those themes. The leader is also a symbolic center of gravity, serving as the master of ceremonies or host at ritual events, playing a starring role in organizational stories, and inventing slogans and jargon that capture the essence of core values. Founders are often seen as creating cultures that mirror their own personal value systems, thereby earning an organizational form of proto-immortality (e.g., Clark, 1970; Hackman, 1984; Schein, 1983). It is no surprise, then, that so many Paradigm 1 cultural descriptions include the implicit or explicit claim that culture can (and,

many argue, should) be managed, as well as created, by leaders.

In summary, Paradigm 1 emphasizes integration. Consistency and consensus (and sometimes leader-centeredness) are the defining characteristics of a Paradigm 1 cultural portrait. In terms of the matrix framework, action and symbolic consistency appear horizontally, across the rows of the matrix. Content consistency appears vertically, in the left-hand column of the matrix. Consensus imples that a single matrix can represent what is known about a culture from a Paradigm 1 perspective. The picture of culture that emerges, then, is monolithic. Organizations are portrayed as having a single dominant culture that generates shared understanding and commitment from all parts of the hierarchy. Pondy's (1983) metaphor captures the essence of this approach: cultures are portrayed as holograms: any fragment encapsulates the essence of the whole.

Paradigm 1 research has been fiercely criticized. These critics argue that Paradigm 1 claims of consistency and consensus are misleading oversimplifications. These shortcomings are often attributed to "inappropriate" methodological strategies, such as over-reliance on high ranking informants and short-term involvement with an organization. Instead, argue these critics, cultures are more accurately characterized by inconsistency and a lack of organization-wide consensus. The texture of this very different kind of cultural description is illustrated below, with excerpts from a Paradigm 2 view of the OZCO culture.

Questioning Egalitarianism at OZCO: A Paradigm 2 Viewpoint

Many OZCO employees question the reality of OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism. Although it is unlikely that any large corporation would be totally egalitarian, some employees feel that OZCO's egalitarian rhetoric masks a hierarchy that is, in the words of one employee, "more adhered to than anywhere that I have ever seen" (Sally, Workforce Planning). In addition, some functional areas are apparently more equal than others. Engineeering, in particular, is said to be singled out for special treatment.

These inequalities are reflected in OZCO's physical arrangements. Although employees eat at the same cafeteria, status and functional differences are reflected in seating patterns:

> I wouldn't hesitate to sit down with my immediate boss, his boss, or his boss's boss. But I wouldn't sit with anyone higher than that. And, of course, I wouldn't eat with engineers. (Dan, Product Manager, Marketing)

Employees who are sceptical about egalitarianism note that although corporate headquarters may be referred to as "retirement village," it is located "upstairs," along with Engineering and

Quality Control. Engineers work in "the Labs," a word often referred to with some deference. The labs, like most of the rest of the company, have open office spaces. However, the walls of the engineers' partitions are higher, supposedly to provide "room for thought." People in marketing, in contrast, "have to go offsite to think."

Rather than being an egalitarian panacea, open office spaces create tension. Some find them a dehumanizing invasion of privacy:

> There was one guy I worked with that made me very uncomfortable. I had to go to great lengths to avoid him. I even tried earplugs, so that I wouldn't have to hear his very personal, agonizing phone conversations. (Denise, Product Sales)

Based on a series of interviews with employees, as well as observation, Hoffman (1982) and Hatch (1985) studied the effects of the apparently egalitarian physical arrangements at OZCO. The open office spaces made employees' behavior visible. Conversations easily could be, and were, overheard. Supervisors could and did literally oversee (by gazing over partitions) the work of their subordinates. From this perspective, the policy of "Management By Walking Around" becomes a way of keeping an eye on employees.

Hoffman even suggests that casual dress norms and informalities, such as the use of first names, give the impression that superiors know their subordinates personally. This creates discomfort for those employees who would prefer more interpersonal distance and/or less company concern with their private lives. Thus, these apparently egalitarian practices and physical arrangements can create tensions between levels of the OZCO hierarchy. Rather than being a source of consensus, according Hoffman and Hatch these cultural manifestations create tension, resentment, and occasional overt conflict.

Although "perks" are supposedly distributed in an egalitarian fashion, based on functional needs or tenure, ultimately who gets what depends on a manager's "pull":

> If my manager has extra money, after everything is taken care of, then I get some perks. (Stuart, Vertical Marketing Engineer)

Although bottom-up consensual decision-making seems an unequivocally egalitarian practice, most important decisions at OZCO require agreement across divisional boundaries. To reach that kind of consensus, employees have to resort to hierarchical sources of authority:

> For example, I was trying to get some guys in third party software to learn about my product before its introduction, so they would be ready to pump it. They had better things to do, so

> I had to go to their boss to get their help. The problem is you use up social capital when you do this. (Tom, Product Marketing Engineer)

Status differences among functional areas also influence the decision-making process. For example:

> There are lots of internal competition and status differentials. Product management is more prestigious than sales and purchasing, and purchasing likes to spite the other divisions. In Group Level meetings there is a lot of finger pointing, rather than coherence into a united force. (Denise, Product Sales)

Opportunities for lateral movement are not equal: the lateral promotion policy is apparently implemented using a highly differentiated power structure:

> Opportunity to move around and ultimately advance depends on relative power and status of division and division manager. (Dana, Sales)

This Paradigm 2 view of OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism pinpoints contradictions and sources of conflict. Although espoused values and formal practices may sound clearly egalitarian, implementation of these policies is apparently uneven. Informal practices and jargon reflect hierarchical and functional status inequalities. Similarly, although physical arrangements appear egalitarian, interpretations of their meaning reflect tensions about these status differences.

Figure 2 summarizes the elements of this Paradigm 2 view of egalitarianism at OZCO using the matrix format. Inconsistencies and a lack of organization-wide consensus are evident in this one matrix. A more complete investigation of these hierarchical and functional differences in perspective might have filled several matrices, each matrix representing a sub-culture. For example, a pair of matrices might contrast the views of top management (this might look much like the Paradigm 1 view presented in Figure 1) with the views of lower level employees. Another set of matrices might contrast the views of the various functional areas, such as engineering and marketing.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Paradigm 2: Differentiation

Where Paradigm 1 research emphasizes consistency and consensus, a Paradigm 2 approach stresses inconsistency and lack of consensus. As in Paradigm 1, Paradigm 2 inconsistency takes

three forms: action, symbolic, and content.

Action inconsistency occurs when espoused ideology conflicts with actual practices (e.g., Argyris and Schon, 1978; Christensen and Kreiner, 1984; Homans, 1974). There are several examples of action inconsistency in the Paradigm 2 view of the OZCO culture. Espoused egalitarian values are contradicted by a variety of formal and informal practices, including: the distribution of "perks" according to a manager's pull and surplus budget; the interpretation of MBWA as a means of maintaining control over subordinate behavior; the hierarchical and functional status differences evident in "consensual" decision-making; evaluation procedures that reward specialization, rather than lateral mobility; and the effects of managerial status on opportunities for lateral movement.

Another example of action inconsistency comes from a petroleum refinery in a "red neck" area of Texas (Siehl, 1984). The refinery's top management team spoke frequently and at length about the importance of combatting the evils of racism and sexism. White male employees, whose jobs could be threatened by an effective affirmative action program, seemed surprisingly unperturbed by this espoused ideology. Inspection of employment records indicated the reason for this complacency; affirmative action was empty rhetoric, designed to protect this predominantly white male preserve from outside interference from affirmative action advocates.

Although the terminology is not the same, studies of loose coupling often draw attention to action inconsistency. For example, Meyer and Rowan's (1977) study of school systems describes inconsistencies between externally espoused rhetoric and actual priorities in the classroom. When addressing external audiences, such as school boards and government funding sources, school administrators stressed the importance of "the numbers": test scores, inventories of textbooks, and the number of classrooms and desks. In contrast, when addressing teachers, administrators acknowledged that talk about "the numbers" was empty rhetoric, designed to buffer the teachers from outside interference so that the work itself, the unquantifiable art of teaching, could continue undisturbed.

Symbolic inconsistency is also characteristic of Paradigm 2 portrayals of culture. In some cases, symbolic meanings associated with artifacts pinpoint conflicts and contradictions in a cultural system (e.g., Smircich, 1983; Smith and Simmons, 1983). For example, in the Paradigm 2 view of OZCO culture, egalitarian rhetoric is contradicted by a variety of artifacts, including: jargon ("upstairs" and "the Labs"); status-stratified seating arrangements in the cafeteria; higher wall partitions for engineers; and discomfort with the invasions of privacy associated with open office space and informal dress codes.

In other cases, symbolic inconsistencies can focus on exceptions that "prove the rule" (Siehl, 1984). For example, the

petroleum refinery described above had a safety record that was superb, by any standard. Yet, the refinery's most popular organizational story concerned "The Labor Day Explosion," when disregard of safety rules caused an employee's death. It seems plausible that, in cases such as this, symbolic inconsistency may emphasize, rather than question, the importance of a core value that is apparently being contradicted.

The third form of inconsistency occurs when content themes conflict with each other. For example, a study of 100 randomly selected Fortune 500 companies isolated a subset of firms that placed significantly more emphasis on the value of taking financial risks. Such risks threaten employee job security. Ironically, this subset of firms was also significantly more likely to espouse humanitarian content themes, such as caring for employees' personal well-being (Martin, Anterasian, and Siehl, 1983). It is possible that such content inconsistencies are intentional. For example, humanitarian value rhetoric may serve as a smokescreen, deflecting attention from the less humane implications of financial risk taking.

Lack of consensus is the second characteristic of a Paradigm 2 portrayal of culture. Most Paradigm 2 research emphasizes sub-cultures, and usually does not even acknowledge sources of organization-wide agreement. Organizational sub-cultures may have positive (enhancing), negative (conflicting), or orthogonal (unvalenced difference) relationships to each other or to a dominant organizational culture (Louis, 1983). For example, a top management team may fanatically support a C.E.O.'s perspective (e.g., Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm, 1985). Or, a counter-culture may arise in opposition to a dominant culture, as in John DeLorean's division of General Motors (Martin and Siehl, 1983). In contrast to these clear alliances and conflicts, orthogonal sub-cultures simply represent different, non-conflicting perspectives. Most orthogonal sub-cultures reflect occupational (e.g., Gregory, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984) or tenure-related (Louis, 1980) differences.

Paradigm 2 portrayals of culture de-emphasize leader-generated sources of cultural content. Instead, Paradigm 2 research stresses the external resource dependencies of the organization, its stage in the organizational life cycle, the impact of tasks and technology, and even the role of cognitive processes, (such as attribution biases and the effects of salience), that cause over-estimation of a leader's impact on events. For example, a study of a small start-up company concluded that the founder had been given retrospective credit for creating aspects of the culture that were, in fact, due to external forces beyond his control (Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm, 1985).

In summary, Paradigm 2 emphasizes differentiation where Paradigm 1 emphasized integration. Paradigm 2 stresses inconsistencies, delineates the absence of organization-wide consensus (usually in the form of overlapping, nested sub-

cultures), and stresses external, rather than leader-centered, sources of cultural content. In terms of the matrix framework, action and symbolic inconsistencies appear across rows, and content inconsistencies appear within the left-hand column of the matrix. Lack of consensus can be represented in one matrix or, in more detail, by constructing multiple matrices, where each matrix represents a separate sub-culture. Although each sub-cultural matrix might include some internal consistency and consensus, the differentiation and fragmentation characteristic of a Paradigm 2 viewpoint would become evident when the various sub-cultural matrices were compared.

Harmony, Conflict, and Ambiguity

Each of the paradigms has a characteristic way of dealing with harmony, conflict, and ambiguity. Given Paradigm 1's emphasis on integration, it is not surprising that most Paradigm 1 portrayals of culture offer an image of cultural harmony, rather than conflict. Just as Benedict (1934) portrayed Indian tribal societies as unified by a single harmonious theme, such as Apollonian detachment, so Paradigm 1 culture research presents pictures of organizational harmony. For example, Ouchi (1980) offers a vision of cultural harmony in his description of clan-type organizations, where organizational members are bound together (and controlled) by common goals, values, and understandings.

Voluntary organizations, worker democracies, social movements, and other interest-based organizations are usually described from a Paradigm 1 perspective, where harmony arises from a single shared ideological commitment. Paradigm 1 portrayals of cultural harmony in large corporate bureaucracies are also common. Indeed, harmony is often celebrated in Paradigm 1 research as the key to improved organizational effectiveness (e.g., Brandt, 1986; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kilmann, 1985; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). In these cultural portraits, top management and lower level employees share the same values and offer the same interpretations of the meaning of actions.

Only occasionally does a Paradigm 1 portrait of culture include a mention of the dark side of the moon: the conflict that can be hidden by an emphasis on harmony. Strong pressures toward consistency and consensus have negative effects, particularly on deviants. Ouchi (1981), for example, speculates that minority members and women may find it more difficult to "fit" into well-integrated cultures dominated by white males, such as those described in Paradigm 1 research.

Because Paradigm 2 emphasizes differentiation, one might expect an emphasis on conflict, rather than harmony. This is not necessarily so. Although the majority of Paradigm 2 portrayals of culture emphasize conflict, some do not. For example, Benedict's description of Japan (1946) stresses

oppositional elements of the culture: the sword and the chrysanthemum, male and female, activity and passivity, etc. Although these elements of the culture are clearly differentiated, their relationship is complementary and harmonious.

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) offer a similarly harmonious portrait of organizational differentiation. For example, functional differences, (such as those between financial administration, production, or marketing) often serve as organizational sub-cultures, each essential for organizational survival. According to Lawrence and Lorsch, effective organizations use integrating mechanisms, such as task forces and liaison roles, to create harmony out of this diversity.

In contrast, other Paradigm 2 portrayals of culture offer a Hobbesian or Marxian vision of deep and enduring conflict (e.g., Abravanel, 1983; Riley, 1983). For example, Smircich, (1983) describes the conflict between a top executive and his employees, who pay lip service to the executive's espoused values while behaving in accord with their own interests. Similar clashes of interest might occur between lower level employees, such as assembly line workers, and management.

The harmony in most Paradigm 1 views of culture is a kind of clarity. This view of culture restricts attention to those manifestations that are clear enough to seem consistent and to engender interpretations that cultural members can agree upon. As a result, culture becomes that which is clear, "an area of meaning cut out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle" (Berger, 1967, p. 23, quoted in Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil, 1984, p. 26). In its quest for lucidity, a Paradigm 1 view of culture denies ambiguity. (In this paper the word ambiguity is used to refer to mental confusion, an internal experience caused by complexity and lack of clarity. This is distinguished from 'uncertainty,' which is used to refer to external or environmental sources of unpredictable change.)(4)

The denial of ambiguity, characteristic of a Paradigm 1 view of culture, is not surprising. There is considerable evidence that, under many circumstances, people find the experience of ambiguity noxious. When stimuli cannot be channeled and anticipated, discomforting information overload can occur. Similarly, when emotions cannot be identified, free-floating anxiety can be overwhelming.

The experience of ambiguity can also bring behavioral paralysis. As bystander intervention research has demonstrated (e.g., Latane and Darley, 1970), people usually do not intervene in an emergency as long as the situation is ambiguously defined. Once the ambiguity is clarified, then, and only then, will bystanders help. When a situation is ambiguous, it is difficult

to know if action is called for, which actions would be appropriate, and what their consequences might be. The frequent result is inaction.

However noxious it may be, people in organizations can endure information overload and free-floating anxiety. In the long run, however, an organization cannot sacrifice its ability to act. Of all the negative effects of ambiguity, it is behavioral paralysis that presents the greatest danger to organizations.

When people are faced with these negative effects of ambiguity, they often react by denying its existence. To cite only one example, Bruner and Postman (1949) reversed the color of some playing cards. Faced with a red ace of spades, subjects would insist the card they saw was black, or was an ace of hearts or diamonds. In a similar fashion, those who adopt a Paradigm 1 view of culture react to ambiguity by denying it.

There are other, less drastic alternatives. Rather than denying ambiguity, it can be channeled, thereby limiting its potentially bewildering and paralyzing effects. Paradigm 2 views of culture can be either harmonious or conflictful. Either way, a kind of clarity is present. Inconsistent cultural manifestations directly contradict each other. Even when conflicts are present, things are clear enough that cultural members know that they disagree on particular issues. The potential complexities of the cultural domain are thereby reduced to dichotomies.

Sub-cultural differentiation "fences in" differences in perspective. Each sub-culture becomes an island of localized lucidity; ambiguities lie only in the interstices among the sub-cultures. Paradigm 2 channels ambiguity, as swift currents create channels around islands. This frees sub-cultural members to perceive and respond to only a small part of the complexities and uncertainties of the organization's environment, thus avoiding action paralysis.

A third reaction to ambiguity is possible. Rather than denying or channeling it, ambiguity could be accepted and made the focus of attention. A view of culture that incorporates the acceptance of ambiguity is so different that it is reasonable to argue that it would represent a third paradigm. From this perspective, cultural members might revel in ambiguity and researchers might legitimate it as a source of innovation, creativity, or change -- perhaps as concomitant of the chaos and excitement of a new venture or rapid growth.

However, this level of comfort with ambiguity is probably unusual. Because of its noxious effects, ambiguity may more often be accepted with reluctance, as an inevitable part of cultural life. It is difficult to imagine members of an "average" Fortune 500 company overjoyed to admit the existence of widespread confusion. Below, we offer a more representative

Paradigm 3 portrait -- a culture where ambiguity is accepted, albeit with some reluctance and dismay.

Confusion About Egalitarianism at OZCO: a Paradigm 3 Perspective

Resources and non-financial rewards are supposed to be distributed at OZCO in a relatively egalitarian fashion. However, how one actually obtains a better office space, a nicer desk, or a newer computer (or any other physical object that can have status connotations) is not clear to many employees. Need, status, power, and tenure all come into play, but there certainly does not seem to be a formula, even within each division.

Confusion is not restricted to issues such as these, where people are apparently unclear about how to implement objectives or even what objectives are desired. Consider OZCO's much-touted commitment to open office spaces. There has long been much private discussion about whether or not open office spaces are "a good thing." This has become such a hot topic that a formal meeting was held, so that the costs and benefits of the open plan (as well as the financial costs of changing to a closed plan) could be publicly debated.

During this meeting, two kinds of confusion emerged. It was not clear whether the open offices were achieving the stated objective of status equalization. Perhaps more importantly, it was not at all clear that employees agreed that this was a top priority, or even an appropriate objective. Some employees were concerned about privacy or work efficiency, while others put greater priority on minimizing status differentials. These goals may be incommensurable and irreconcilable; no consensus about priorities emerged and employees remained confused about how these conflicting objectives should be, and would be, prioritized.

Awareness of ambiguity pervades employee discussions about the difficulties of getting things done within the OZCO bureaucracy:

> There are a number of layers. The charters of different divisions often overlap. If you are going to impact other divisions then it's very difficult. Because rules and procedures differ across divisions, much confusion results when policies have to move across divisional boundaries. (Dan, Product Manager, Marketing)

This ambiguity about means for getting things done is exacerbated by the company's emphasis on low level, consensual decision making practices. One problem is that, given the size of the company, few employees know what's going on outside their level of the hierarchy and their division:

> Products have to work together. (They) can't work in isolation. They're not set up to do this. OZCO is a lot of

little companies. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

As a result, some employees feel that decisions are based on little (and often erroneous) information. In addition, "no one" can make a decision because decisions are pushed to the lowest level. If a decision involves other divisions, the decision must must move up and across the hierarchy. Getting decisions moved around in this way seems to be a very ambiguous process:

> It seems that when one moves beyond the division level to the group level there is a problem. When there is no way the divisions can coordinate on their own, then, a group manager is called in to "fix it." How far up to coordinate a project is unclear. These things come to people's attention where we choose to measure our results. When divisions are having trouble, when they've lost some sales because of lack of links, then they go to the group level to "fix it." (Stuart, Vertical Marketing Engineer)

Similar confusion surrounds OZCO's lateral promotion policy. Lateral movement is often encouraged, but there is considerable confusion about how you go about moving around, how you get interviews with other divisions, and how you get the support of your own boss for a transfer:

> (Employees) can move around, although I really don't know how one does this. During a hiring freeze especially, I don't know how to get support for a transfer. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

Organizational stories at OZCO suggest that not all employees are even aware that lateral, rather than vertical, promotions are the norm. For example:

> A very competent woman for two and a half years had been working in corporate personnel on the workforce restructuring project. She was passed over for a job that she would have been a natural for. Later, she was told that if she wanted to move ahead she had to come up (laterally) through the divisions. This was the first she had heard of this policy, even though she had been working on workforce issues for two and a half years. It wasn't clear to her. (Sally, Workforce Planning)

Was this woman never told of the policy because her chances of promotion were nil? Or, were her chances of promotion nil because she was not smart enough to realize the importance and personal relevance of the lateral promotion policy when she heard about it? Or, are females and other minorities less likely to be coached by the informal "old boy" network of line managers who watch for "promotable" subordinates?

Or, was the woman in the story not seen as having the skills that make a person "promotable"? Personnel staff jobs at OZCO are often not particularly respected by group and divisional employees, in part because staff decisions are often undercut, without appropriate official authority, by corporate employees (Joni, Corporate Development). Perhaps as a result, line

managers almost always come from engineering, rather than personnel. In addition to portraying the ignorance of a single employee, this organizational story pinpoints a number of sources for the ambiguity that surrounds the company's lateral promotion policy.

One central aspect of any promotion policy is performance evaluation, and here too, there is considerable ambiguity about the process itself, as well as the criteria used. Theoretically, employees are evaluated on their own performance. However, employees are all ranked using different salary curves, depending on their level in the OZCO hierarchy. Employees often don't know who they are being compared to and what the criteria for ranking are:

> I'm not well versed in the ranking process because it's done by first line managers and up. I know pay increases are based on merit, but merit really depends on your job...since different jobs are compared to each other it's difficult. It's difficult to compare apples to oranges here and I don't know how they do it...I'm a product marketing engineer here and I'm ranked against a lab engineer. (Tom, Product Marketing Engineer)

> I think we are ranked based on the power of the divisions. Managers of each divison argue for rank criteria that will favor their own division. The managers don't know what other division members even do. One product manager says evaluation is based on new product development, another says they don't know, another says growth. (Denise, Product Sales)

In summary, these employees are confused about OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism. They hear relatively egalitarian rhetoric about the distribution of resources and non-financial rewards, open office spaces, consensual decision making, and lateral promotions. However, their own experiences, and those of other employees, leave them confused about what the purposes of these policies are, whether these policies are desirable, how these policies are implemented, and why.

Figure 3 summarizes the main elements of this Paradigm 3 view of egalitarianism at OZCO. As in the two previous portraits of the culture of OZCO, a Paradigm 3 view isolates and traces content themes as they surface in practices and artifacts. Although cell entries in the matrix can be made, questions of consistency and inconsistency are not possible within a Paradigm 3 framework. Instead, any cultural manifestation is an equivocal stimulus, open to multiple interpretations, not fully understood by either researchers or cultural members.

Insert Figure 3 about here.

Paradigm 3: The Acceptance of Ambiguity

In Paradigm 3, cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity. Differences in interpretation are seen as incommensurable, irreconcilable, and inevitable. From this perspective, the clarity of Paradigm 1 or even the clear oppositions of a dichotomous analysis, characteristic of Paradigm 2, would be viewed as oversimplifications, perhaps created or reinforced by management for purposes of control (Siehl, 1984).

A Paradigm 3 culture cannot be characterized as generally harmonious or conflictful. Instead, individuals share some viewpoints, disagree about some, and are ignorant of or indifferent to others. Consensus, dissensus, and confusion coexist, making it difficult to draw cultural and sub-cultural boundaries. Certainly those boundaries would not coincide with structural divisions or permanent linking roles, as an absence of clarity would undermine the usefulness of these integrating and differentiating mechanisms.

One metaphor for a Paradigm 3 culture is a web. Individuals are nodes in the web, connected by shared concerns to some but not all the surrounding nodes. When a particular issue becomes salient, one pattern of connections becomes relevant. That pattern would include a unique array of agreements, disagreements, and pockets of ignorance. A different issue would draw attention to a different pattern of connections -- and different sources of confusion. Whenever a new issue becomes salient to cultural members or researchers, a new pattern of connections becomes significant.

A Paradigm 3 view of culture, then, would have no universally shared, integrating set of values, save one: an awareness of ambiguity itself. From a Paradigm 3 perspective, researchers and cultural members see (and perhaps even look for) complexity, confusion, and paradox -- that which is not clear. Rather than being "a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle," a Paradigm 3 view of culture is the jungle itself. The defining characteristics of this third paradigm are summarized and contrasted with the characteristics of the other two paradigms in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 about here.

This third view of culture raises a set of serious questions about the nature of culture itself. Would a culture that fully accepted ambiguity deteriorate into chaos and anarchy? If so, would such a culture represent a third cultural paradigm or would

it be more accurate to say that an acceptance of ambiguity means an absence of culture? What is the essence of culture, without which culture cannot be said to exist? Does a minimum of consistency and consensus have to be present, in order to stave off the forces of chaos and anarchy? Does the existence of culture necessitate the denial or channeling of ambiguity?

Answers to these questions are hard to come by because no culture research has yet used a Paradigm 3 perspective. However, the research of March and his colleagues on "organized anarchies" (e.g., Brunsson, 1985; Hedberg, 1981; March & Olsen, 1976), although not specifically focused on cultural issues, does provide insight into these questions. This research often focuses on decision-making process in large public bureaucracies or educational institutions. In these "organized anarchies," complexities and lack of clarity are the rule, rather than the exception. Ambiguities are seen as unavoidable and, in some cases, desirable aspects of organizational functioning.

Many of these "organized anarchies" exist in order to reflect the diversity of the multiple constituencies they represent. Thus, patterns of connection are diffuse, and consensus, for any length of time, is hard to come by. When it occurs, it often does so on one level (perhaps agreement on a policy), but not on another (how to implement that policy or why that policy is desirable). Action paralysis is often the norm (e.g., Brunsson, 1985), and when it is not, action is often generated without full comprehension or consensus concerning its meaning or intended effects (e.g., Starbuck, 1983).

This literature, like most organizational literature outside the domain of cultural studies, tends to focus on formal and informal practices, such as decision making procedures, overlapping work roles, informal communication, and evolving job definitions. Thus, very little is known about the symbolic interpretation of artifacts in Paradigm 3 cultures. One exception is Feldman's (1983) study of a large federal agency, which includes several organizational stories, such as "The New Administration Effect:"

> A new employee at the agency reluctantly accustomed himself to the absence of hot water, air conditioning, and adequate hall lighting in the agency's office building. One morning, as he walked down the hall, the lights suddenly switched on, the soft whirr of the air conditioner could be heard, and the faucets once more gushed hot water upon request. An old timer laughed at the new employees puzzlement, observing "It's no mystery. This always happens when a new administration takes over."

The bewilderment of the new employee and the overwhelming sense of confusion that permeate this story may be characteristic of the symbolic aspects of life within Paradigm 3. Clearly, however, this is an intriguing and largely unexplored domain for further research.

Because the organizational descriptions cited above have many Paradigm 3 elements, it is possible to address some of the questions, raised above, concerning the relationship between Paradigm 3, chaos, and the "absence of culture." Although March and his colleagues label these organizations "anarchies," the descriptions they offer do not portray chaos. Although these organizational descriptions often include evidence of behavioral paralysis, these organizations continue to function, and organizational members continue to be associated with them.

We do not think that organizational cultures, portrayed from a Paradigm 3 viewpoint, have an absence of culture. Instead, Paradigm 3 portrays a distinctive view of culture, one that is centered on ambiguity itself. If this is correct, culture may not necessarily involve the denial or channeling of ambiguity. It could also include the acceptance of ambiguity, an acceptance that may be either reluctant or enthusiastic.

This variation in attitudes about ambiguity raises a question. The new agency employee apparently reacted to ambiguity with puzzlement and a feeling of powerlessness. OCC employees accepted ambiguity with reluctance and dismay; they saw it as a problem. In other settings, such as "start-up firms," research and development laboratories, and "skunk works," cultural members are usually quite comfortable with ambiguity. This kind of comfort might also be prevalent in some occupational sub-cultures, such as social workers, academic researchers, and teachers. Finally, personality research indicates that some individuals develop unusually high levels of tolerance for ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Snoek, and Rosenthal, 1964; Rokeach, 1960). In some contexts, then, the experience of ambiguity is not considered noxious. Indeed, if some academics, innovators, and entrepreneurs are to be believed, sometimes the experience of ambiguity is a delight. Why?

These are peculiar cultural settings. New ventures, research laboratories, and members of the helping professions are in the business of innovation -- creating a new product, running a new business, or solving an indeterminate or previously insoluable problem. When innovation is the objective, people may be more willing to accept ambiguity. Thus, in its emphasis on ambiguity, Paradigm 3 may provide a key to understanding the processes of innovation and change.

There are a variety of sources of ambiguity: unclear expectations, preferences, and evaluation criteria; loosely coupled actions and outcomes; and rapid change, to name a few. These sources of ambiguity suggest several reasons why ambiguity and innovation may be linked. When expectations, preferences, and evaluation criteria are unclear, there is no apparent right or wrong outcome. Because there is no risk of being "wrong," experimentation, and thus creativity, are encouraged. And if objectives are not clear, a priori, they can be permitted to emerge. This may be why ambiguity is salient in such occupations as academic research and social work.

When the source of ambiguity is loose coupling between actions and outcomes, innovation may be encouraged for slightly different reasons. For example, entrepreneurs often observe and experience outcomes that seem to be out of their control. In spite of extreme dedication and hard work their new ventures may fail; or, a venture may succeed, for no apparent or forseeable reason, beyond pure luck. Under these kinds of ambiguous conditions, negative consequences of actions, as well as their causes, are difficult to detect and evaluate. As a result, ambiguity brings individuals a sense of safety and with that safety, autonomy for acting, playing, and experimenting (McCall, 1977; McCaskey, 1982; March and Olsen, 1976; Rogers, 1961; Weick, 1979:1985).

With this freedom, interpretations, causal explanations, and preferences can be allowed to emerge retrospectively, after actions have occurred (Brunsson, 1985; March, 1976, 1981; Starbuck, 1983). Without the constraints of prospective planning and rationalization, it becomes easier to innovate:

> An organization can learn new things about itself and about its environment when ambiguity is present. If an organization continues to act even though it doesn't know for certain what it is doing, there is a chance that the organization will emerge from its confrontation with ambiguity in slightly different shape than when it started to cope. In this way ambiguity can produce innovation and greater utilization of resources. (Weick, 1985:125)

If ambiguity does provide a key to innovation, then does the denial or channeling of ambiguity impede the innovative process? In other words, are cultures whose members are more likely to share a Paradigm 1 or 2 perspective less capable of innovating, when innovation is called for? The phrasing of these questions presumes that people can adopt only one paradigm at a time. The final section of this chapter suggests that a single-paradigm perspective (any single paradigm) may be less informative and useful than a perspective that combines insights from all three paradigms.

Integrating the Three Paradigms

Paradigms are subjective perspectives that researchers and cultural members adopt when they perceive, conceive, or enact a culture. Researchers and cultural members tend to view a given culture from a single paradigmatic perspective. Some contexts have characteristics that are more easily seen as fitting one paradigm rather than another. For example, ambiguity may be particularly salient in a rapidly growing company in the innovative "high technology" industry. Ambiguity may be unavoidable during traumatic changes, such as a merger or an unexpected financial crisis. Paradigm 3, therefore, may be the most obvious perspective from which to view organizations in

these circumstances.

Different contexts may facilitate the adoption of the other paradigms. For example, entrepreneurial organizations, where employees are all committed to a common vision, or worker democracies, where members are united by a common purpose or ideology, may lend themselves to a Paradigm 1 perspective. Similarly, a Paradigm 2 viewpoint may be easier to use in highly differentiated contexts, such as a multi-national, a conglomerate, or a firm with a multi-divisional structure. Paradigm 2 may also seem to fit steeply hierarchical organizations, for example a manufacturing operation with a clear, and perhaps embittered, split between labor and management.

There are other factors that might influence paradigmatic preferences. For example, top executives and some organizational behavior teachers and consultants might find the harmony, unity, and leader-centeredness of Paradigm 1 comforting in its implications for employee satisfaction and managerial control. Middle managers and research scientists might be more inclined to Paradigm 3, as they cope with ambiguities caused by conflicting multiple roles or complex problems. Labor activists and researchers with Marxist leanings may be more at ease with a Paradigm 2 view of sub-cultures struggling with irreconcilable contradictions and conflicts of interest.

It is a misleading oversimplification to rely on any single-paradigm view of a culture. Instead, any culture can be usefully regarded from all three paradigmatic viewpoints. This point is illustrated well by the results of a recent study of a small, young electronics firm (Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm, 1985). In such a firm the leader could "hand pick" employees. Furthermore, the leader had a relatively small realm to control. These features should facilitate the development of organization-wide consensus characteristic of Paradigm 1.

The founder of the firm and a stratified, random sample of employees were interviewed. They were asked, using a structured, open-ended interview format, to recount and interpret the meaning of whichever events in the company's history they personally considered important. These interview protocols were systematically content analyzed. Any element of an event history or its interpretation, mentioned by two or more individuals, was coded.

In accord with Paradigm 1, some evidence of leader-centered, organization-wide consensus was found. Almost all the employees and the founder chose the same events in the organization's history to recount; they agreed that the leader was a central actor in all of these events; and they frequently stressed the fact of the company's growth in their interpretations of the meanings of these events.

Paradigm 2, however, would predict that sub-cultural

differences would emerge in the content and interpretations of these event histories, even in such a small, young organization. The remainder of the results of the content analysis was consistent with Paradigm 2. Sub-cultures had already begun to emerge. The content of the event histories differed significantly, according to level in the hierarchy and functional responsibility.

For example, one of the most frequently cited events concerned the quality control problems that had plagued the company since its incorporation. Production engineers attributed the resolution of these problems to changes they had made in the production process. Marketing personnel took credit for the same success, attributing it to their having soothed angry customers. Almost every functional area of the organization reconstructed accounts of the quality control crisis so that members of its sub-culture were heros and heroines.

Expressions of confusion, acknowledgments of lack of clarity, and complaints about complexity could also be found in the interview data. However, this evidence, consistent with a Paradigm 3 perspective, was not included in the coding system because, at the time this study was conducted, we had not yet included ambiguity within our conceptualization of cultural life in organizations. Thus, this study provided evidence of the coexistence of Paradigms 1 and 2 and -- had we looked for it at the time -- Paradigm 3 as well.

Any cultural context is more fully understood -- in its current complexity and in its potential for innovation -- when it is viewed from all three paradigmatic perspectives. Paradigms should not be blinders. Instead, they should be thought of as a set of three lenses, each one to be used in turn, in order to capture a full view of all three aspects of any one cultural context. While it is not easy to adopt a multiple-paradigm viewpoint, it is not impossible. It is possible for researchers to do it, otherwise this chapter could not have been written. It is also possible for cultural members to use a multiple-paradigm perspective. For example, some OZCO employees are quoted in two or even three of the paradigmatic views of their organization's culture.

Paradigms are points of view. At any time, in any context, elements of all three paradigms are present. Each should be acknowledged. If this were done by cultural researchers, our descriptions of cultures would be richer and more complete, hopefully generating fuller comprehension of cultural phenomena. If cultural members could regularly use a multiple-paradigm perspective, this might facilitate the innovation that accompanies an acknowledgment of ambiguity. When a multiple-paradigm perspective is adopted, the experience of ambiguity is neither unaccustomed nor overwhelming. Instead, some acceptance of ambiguity is always present. That acceptance might wax, perhaps during times of crisis, and wane, perhaps during times of stability or prosperity. At no time, however, would ambiguity be

denied. and so at no time would innovation be impeded. Ambiguity could flourish openly, without bringing the usual dangers of action paralysis.

Footnotes

(1) There is considerable debate among anthropologists about the appropriateness of including formal and informal practices within the domain of what is defined as culture. For example, Keesing (1981:68-69) takes the position that:

> We will restrict the term culture to an ideational system. Cultures in this sense comprise systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live. Culture, so defined, refers to what humans learn, not what they do and make.

According to this cognitive definition of culture, the social and material arrangements that we have labeled formal and informal practices belong to a non-cultural domain, often labeled "social structure." Geertz supports this cognitive point of view, observing that:

> Culture is that fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the ... network of social relations. Culture and social structure are ... different abstractions from the same phenomena (1957:33-34, quoted in Keesing, 1981:74).

The cognitive approach to the study of culture leads to shortcomings, particularly in the ability to "conceptualize the processes of cultural transmission and change and to relate them to economic and political realities" (Keesing, 1981:73).

Most organizational culture researchers, like many anthropologists, consider these shortcomings of the cognitive approach to be fatal flaws. In a sense, an organization is an explicit attempt to control the behavior of employees in order to produce goods and/or services. Because most organizations are set up for such utilitarian objectives, an understanding of economic and political realities, and the processes of change, is inseparable from a study of organizational culture. A cognitive approach restricts the culture researcher to the study of ideas and values, aspects of culture (the "soft fuzzies") that are difficult to measure and are only indirectly related to the organization's utilitarian objectives. Thus, an exclusively cognitive approach constrains what the study of culture can contribute to an understanding of organizations. For these reasons, most organizational researchers include formal and informal practices within the domain of culture.

The inclusion of formal and informal practices, as an essential part of culture, is particularly important for those who are concerned with conflicts of interest within an organizational hierarchy. From this (often politically leftist) point of view, organizational cultures do not simply exist in the

realm of ideas or values: they constitute a specific, material condition of existence that some consider oppressive and exploitive. It is therefore essential that the study of culture include structural, economic, and social specificities. It is misleading to portray an organizational culture as an arcane, ungrounded world of ideas and values, disconnected from the practicalities of earning a pay check for doing work, a portion of which is, in any job, distasteful, stressful, and, for some, physically taxing.

The matrix framework can encompass a cognitive approach to the study of culture, as long as formal and informal practices are omitted. However, because of the utilitarian goals of most organizations, and because of the possibility of material forms of oppression, we believe that the inclusion of practices within the domain of culture is essential.

(2) The term "artifact" was introduced to organizational culture researchers by Schein (1981).

(3) A fully or partially completed matrix, or set of matrices, summarizes what is known about a given culture at a single point in time, across one or more levels of analysis. An additional advantage of the matrix framework is that it lends itself to comparison: across levels of analysis within a given organization (as described above), over time for a single organization, and across organizations. Such comparisons could be used to articulate complexities of a single culture, trace the evolution of that culture over time, or develop generalizations about culture that might hold across organizational boundaries.

(4) Portions of this discussion of ambiguity and Paradigm 3 are presented in Meyerson and Martin (1986).

FIGURE 1: EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO

(1) CONTENT THEMES		(2) PRACTICES		(3) ARTIFACTS				
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL	STORIES	RITUALS	JARGON	PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS	ETC.
Egalitarian sharing		Participation in United Way, stock plan, profit sharing	M.B.W.A. as status equalizer	Strategic planning not the "OZCO way"	President's behavior at parties after seminars and award ceremonies	"Retirement village"	Casual dress One cafeteria Open offices No reserved parking	
		Answer own telephone						
		"Perk" distribution based on need, not status						
		Consensual decision making						
		Lateral promotions						

FIGURE 2: QUESTIONING EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO

(1) CONTENT THEMES		(2) PRACTICES		(3) ARTIFACTS				
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL	STORIES	RITUALS	JARGON	PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS	ETC.
	Egalitarianism is questioned		"Perk" distribution based on managers' pull and surplus budget			"Upstairs" / "the Labs"	Seating in Cafeteria segregated by status and function	
			M.B.W.A. as keeping eye on subordinates				Higher partitions for engineers than marketing personnel	
			Hierarchical authority and functional status differences often override consensual decision-making				Open offices cause discomfort	
			Opportunity for lateral promotion depends on power and status of manager				Casual dress, etc. cause intrusion into personal lives	

FIGURE 3: CONFUSION ABOUT EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO

(1) CONTENT THEMES		(2) PRACTICES		(3) ARTIFACTS				
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL	STORIES	RITUALS	JARGON	PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS	ETC.
	Confusion about egalitarianism	Performance evaluation criteria and process unclear; lateral moves don't seem to "count"	"Perk" distribution norms hard to figure out	Competent woman never heard of lateral promotion policy			Open office spaces debated; goal priorities and effects unclear	
			Confusion about how to implement policies, particularly in different divisions					
			Consensual decision making produces confusion and poor quality decisions					
			Ignorance and confusion about how lateral promotion policy works					

FIGURE 4: CONTRASTING THE PARADIGMS

PARADIGM 1: INTEGRATION	PARADIGM 2: DIFFERENTIATION
CONSISTENCY	INCONSISTENCY
CONSENSUS	CONSENSUS WITHIN, NOT BETWEEN, SUBCULTURES
METAPHORS: HOLOGRAM, CLEARING IN JUNGLE	METAPHOR: ISLANDS OF CLARITY
DENIAL OF AMBIGUITY	CHANNELING OF AMBIGUITY

PARADIGM 3: AMBIGUITY

LACK OF CLARITY

ISSUE-SPECIFIC CONSENSUS, DISSENSUS, OR CONFUSION

METAPHORS: WEB, JUNGLE

ACCEPTANCE OF AMBIGUITY

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